



State of Wisconsin
Department of Public Instruction
Elizabeth Burmaster, State Superintendent

*****NEWS RELEASE*****

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Gates Foundation grant to help train library staff

MADISON—State Superintendent Elizabeth Burmaster announced that the Department of Public Instruction Division for Libraries, Technology, and Community Learning has received a \$192,800 “Staying Connected” grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. “Staying Connected” grants are challenge grants, with the Gates Foundation matching funds raised by the state at a 2-1 ratio.

“The Gates Foundation grant will help us train public library staff to become more proficient in using technology, including the Internet,” Burmaster said. “Maintaining excellent library services requires us to keep abreast of changes in technology to better serve the residents of our state, and we are grateful to the Gates Foundation for supporting those efforts.”

The majority of the grant will be used by Wisconsin’s 17 regional public library systems to offer workshops and other support for technology to their member libraries. The DPI’s Division for Libraries, Technology, and Community Learning also will use a portion of the grant to support training for its sponsored programs. Those include the statewide library catalog (WISCAT) and BadgerLink, the state’s on-line library, which provides free access to more than 700 newspapers and 11,000 magazines, photographs, maps, book reviews, and reference materials. BadgerLink patrons conduct more than 8 million searches annually.

The “Staying Connected” grants are the third in a series of grants awarded to all 50 states and territories by the Gates Foundation. In 2002, just over half of the state’s 388 public libraries received \$3.1 million in grants to purchase computers and software to allow public access to the Internet. In 2003, the DPI received a grant for \$94,050 for training public library staff.

Public libraries play a vital role in bridging the digital divide for those who do not have access to computers and the Internet at home. According to U.S. Census data, just 56 percent of Wisconsin households have computers and 50 percent have Internet access. With the help of these grants, all public libraries in Wisconsin are now connected to the Internet.

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